

# Photography's Album



An autoethnography on mediating time  
with smartphones, Kodaks and camera obscuras

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## Certificate of Original Authorship

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as part of the collaborative doctoral degree and/or fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

Captured images draw the visual presence of what has been into the now, and so create sites of mourning where the past returns as the presence of absence. With an eye to photography as a haunting medium, this thesis asks how images in the networked smartphone ecology work to deny or intuit the medium's capacity for returning history to the present. Every twenty-four hours just under four-hundred million shots are uploaded live to Facebook and Instagram, accentuating that networkers are "here and now," even as a vast repository of data accumulates social media's everyday records of departed experience. In this environment of photographic abundance, what are the modes of remembrance and presencing which show the medium to be a correspondence between what is, and what has been?

This research seeks to reunite smartphone photography with the theories of Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes whose imaginative exchanges with images illuminate photographs as encounters with loss. 'Photography's Album' posits that the medium's online ecology still has the power to return personal experience through the presence of absence, and that this temporal dynamic is constitutive of the liveness of networked photographic practice. Where new memory studies and communication network studies suggest that photography's networked immediacy outstrips any prior association with mourning, this study suggests that contemporary techno-social forms of the medium are in fact used to negotiate the continual disappearance of present experience, and the affective re-emergence of memories. To this end the thesis develops a notion of photography's temporal dynamic as the co-existence of loss with emergence, and adopts Henri Bergson's notion of duration to underscore the coalescence of the past within the mediated present.

The album genre is deployed to form a non-chronological constellation of images and writing, where personal family photographs are placed in correspondence with historically renowned shots. Via this fragmentary creative form, the work cuts across different manifestations of the medium, and reveals that any photograph has the potential to be known again, beyond the technological affordances of its moment of capture. The autoethnographic "I" is used to problematise boundaries between self and other as these images entangle lives and stories. The thesis and its photographic writing create an act of return, one that reimagines the medium's relationship with personal mourning, not as a static embalming of the past, but as a generative reminder of the durational forces which constitute each present instant.